

1201 – CHILD PLACEMENT SERVICES

CHANGE #05-2008

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III. PLACEMENT PREVENTION

A. Reasonable Efforts Requirements

System of Care and Multiple Response shows us that most children are best served if their safety, health and well-being can be protected while remaining with their own families. When the County Department of Social Services becomes involved with a family after a substantiation of abuse, neglect, or dependency or a finding of services needed, the primary concern continues to be the child's safety, health, well-being and permanency. The agency is responsible for making *reasonable efforts* both to maintain the child safely in the home, and to reunify a child and his/her family if removal has been necessary.

N.C.G.S. § 7B-101 defines reasonable efforts as "the diligent use of preventive or reunification services when a juvenile's remaining in the home or returning home is consistent with achieving a safe, permanent home for the juvenile within a reasonable period of time." The law defines a safe home as "a home in which children are not at substantial risk of abuse or neglect."

B. Children in DSS Custody Who Remain in the Home

The County Department of Social Services may be ordered by the Court to retain custody of a child while he/she remains with the family. At the point the child enters DSS custody, a determination has been made by the Court that the child is at risk of foster care placement. The agency shall provide close supervision of the children and families in this situation. These cases require intensive services and frequent reviews to ensure the safety of the children in custody.

Services to families with children in DSS custody who remain in the home should be time limited. After time-limited services, the agency should recommend to the Court either that custody is returned to the parents or that the child is placed out of home.

C. Assessment and Planning for Services to Prevent Placement

1. Risk Assessment

Risk assessment is an ongoing process that starts at the time a case is accepted for a CPS investigative assessment and continues until case closure. The risk assessment process helps social workers define service needs of the family and forms the basis for the **Family Services Agreements**. For County Departments of Social Services, the **Safety Assessment (dss-5231)**, **Family Risk Assessment (dss-5230)**, **Family Assessment of Strengths and Needs (dss-**

5229), Risk Reassessment (dss-5226) and Reunification Assessment (dss-5227) organize critical information to help guide the social worker's professional judgment regarding the health and safety of all children living in the home.

2. Family Services Agreements

The **Family Services Agreements** are the tools that guide service delivery to families for preventing placement. Risk assessment is the basis for the development of the **Family Services Agreements**. Risk factors and family strengths identified in the Family Risk Assessment, Strengths and Needs Assessment, Risk Reassessment and Reunification Assessment shall be reflected in **Family Services Agreements**. Objectives and activities shall be directed toward alleviating the risk factors.

The Case Decision Summary / Initial Case Plan (**dss-5228**) is completed at the time a case decision is made to substantiate abuse, neglect, ~~or~~ dependency or a finding of Services Needed is made and remains in effect until the appropriate **Family Services Agreement** is complete. The Case Decision Summary-/Initial Case Plan documents the critical needs within the family that caused agency involvement and the immediate activities that the agency will conduct or arrange to address these needs and to protect the safety of the child in the home.

The appropriate **Family Services Agreement** is completed within 30 days of a case decision to substantiate abuse, neglect, ~~or~~ dependency, or a finding of services needed and it replaces the Case Decision Summary / Initial Case Plan. The In-Home Family Services Agreement (**dss-5239**) is used when family preservation is the plan. The Out of Home Family Services Agreement (**dss-5240**) is used when family reunification is the plan. If the child is in DSS custody and remains in his/her home, the Out of Home Family Services Agreement is used.

(Refer to Section **1201, Family Services Agreements** for more information.)

3. Kinship Support for Families

Prior to placement, social workers shall involve the extended family and the kinship network in providing support and resources for parents and children. Multiple Response encourages social workers to partner with families. Allowing parents and their kinship network to share in the decision surrounding the safety of the children goes along way towards obtaining they buy in of the parents and the kinship network, thus sharing power. Parents facing the potential removal of their children from their homes should be given a reasonable opportunity to come together with their kinship network to plan for and provide safety, care, nurture, and supervision for their child. The agency shall remain involved with the family providing placement **and** the birth family until the child's ongoing safety is assured and the placement is legally secure (which means that the relative or kin

caregiver has the legal authority to make parental decisions on behalf of the child) or until the DSS files a petition for custody.

Kinship relationships are self-defined. Many families value non-relatives as kin, such as godparents, friends and neighbors with whom they have a family-like relationship. Social workers can help families identify who they consider to be part of their kinship network.

The agency should help to mobilize the family's extended family and kinship network in the process of:

- assessing the risk of harm to the child;
- providing resources to eliminate that risk;
- developing a plan for the protection, permanence, and well-being of the child;
- tailoring that plan to the needs, resources, support and desires of the family;
- implementing the plan; and
- evaluating the implementation of the plan.

Social workers shall also conduct comprehensive searches for missing parents prior to placement. The early identification of a child's legal and biological parents is critical to the planning for the child, to the development of resources for the child, and provides the groundwork necessary if the case is brought to the Court's attention. It is also critical for finding both maternal and paternal kinship/relative supports for the child.

4. Community-Based Support for Families

Multiple Response and System of care clearly demonstrates that Community-based support for families is the key to strengthening and preserving families and effectively preventing the removal of children from their homes. Community-based support for families should begin prior to the removal of children from their homes. County Departments of Social Services should involve the community in building resources for a family and improving parents' ability to provide adequate parental care and supervision for their children.

Prior to foster care placement, social workers shall help families build their resources and support systems within the community. Social workers should help parents learn how to access available services provided by other agencies and how to obtain the resources they need. Social workers should also refer families to other community agencies for services that meet the identified needs of the family.

Community Child Protection Teams are a vital resource in accessing community-based support for families. These teams represent community agencies, organizations and community action groups. The teams are mandated by law to review cases and advocate for community resources. By collectively reviewing

the needs of a family and by offering solutions to a family crisis, these teams can help prevent out-of-home placement.

(Refer to [The Yellow Pages](#) for more information about Community-Based Support for Families.)

5. Family Support and Family Preservation Services

Family Support and Family Preservation Services are intervention services designed to help families regain optimal functioning and alleviate family crises that may lead to out-of-home placement of children. These services are a resource for families that want to prevent the removal of their children. These services are family-focused, as well as home- and community-based.

- Family Support Services are primarily preventive services designed to alleviate family stress, to promote parental competence, and to enable families to access resources and supportive networks. One frequent component of Family Support Services is the Family Resource Center, a centralized source for supportive family services.
- Family Preservation Services (FPS) are various family focused, community and home-based services designed to help families alleviate crises that may lead to out-of-home placement for children. These programs help parents to maintain children safely in their own home, support families preparing to reunite or adopt, and assist families in obtaining services and supports in a culturally sensitive manner.
- Intensive Family Preservation Services (IFPS) are in-home crisis intervention services designed to help families who are at imminent risk of having children removed from the home.

Family Support Services, Family Preservation Services and Intensive Family Preservation Services are administered by the Division of Social Services, but may be provided under contract by other public and private agencies.

Foster care staff may refer families for Family Support Services, Family Preservation Services, or Intensive Family Preservation Services, depending on the family situation and the availability of the resource in a specific county. Families may be birth families, foster families, or adoptive families at risk of disruption.

At this time these services are not available in all counties. If social workers do not know whether or not such services exist in their community, they may contact the state office for Community Based Programs at (919) 733-2279.

a. Family Preservation Services (FPS)

Family Preservation Services help parents to maintain children safely in their own home, support families preparing to reunite or adopt, and assist families in obtaining services and supports in a culturally sensitive manner. A broad range and variety of services may be offered, and may differ by region based on each community's defined priorities.

Eligibility for FPS

- Referred families include one or more children ages birth through 17 years.
- Alternative, less intensive intervention strategies have been tried without success or considered but determined to be inappropriate or unavailable to the child and family.
- With family preservation services, it is believed to be safe for the child(ren) and the family for the child(ren) to remain in the home.
- The agency making the referral must have discussed FPS with the family and at least one parent or other primary caregiver indicates that he/she is willing and able to participate in FPS.

Characteristics of FPS

- Priority is given to families with children at risk for current or future role dysfunction in the home or community.
- Services are time limited - provided for a maximum of six months.
- Services are home-based.
- Services provided are both therapeutic and concrete.
- Clients have access to crisis/emergency services 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- Family preservation caseworkers have specialized training and support to provide this service.

Response to Referrals

There must be response within three days to referrals for FPS. It is suggested that the referral source be contacted within two working days with information regarding the capability to respond to referral. If the family cannot be served immediately, they may be placed on a waiting list, if appropriate. An initial contact (telephone or face-to-face) must be attempted within three working days. If contact has not been made within four working days, the referral source must be informed of this and can take action accordingly.

Caseloads for FPS

Caseloads range from two to eight families at a time. Families can be served for up to six months. This standard is set to allow flexibility in response to individual family service needs while at the same time endorsing the principles of a time limited intervention service model.

The Role of the FPS Supervisor

- provide on-the-job training and coaching to newly employed FPS caseworkers;
- provide back-up for FPS caseworkers;
- attend initial family screening with FPS caseworkers as needed;
- provide at least one hour per week of individual consultation to FPS caseworkers;
- be the primary supervisor available for consultation 24 hours per day, seven days a week.

In order to provide the level of supervision and support necessary for FPS, it is recommended that programs maintain a maximum supervisor to staff ratio of 1:10.

b. Intensive Family Preservation Services (IFPS)

Eligibility for IFPS

Families eligible for intensive family preservation are those with one or more children ages birth through 17 years who are determined to be a danger to themselves or others, or are endangered by persons in the home, and the endangerment is sufficient to put the child(ren) at imminent risk of out-of-home placement with the social services, mental health/developmental disabilities/substance abuse services, or juvenile the justice system.

Intensive Family Preservation Services are directed only to families in which one or more children are at imminent risk of placement. Eligibility for services must be certified through documentation of the following referral/acceptance criteria:

- The safety risk to the child(ren) or to the community has reached the point that the intervention service needs of the family are beyond the resources (time, skills, staff, etc.) of the current service provider
- With Intensive Family Preservation Services, it is believed to be safe for the child(ren), the family, the IFS caseworker and the community for the child(ren) to remain in the home.
- The parents, the County Department of Social Services, District Court judge, court counselor staff, area MH/DD/SAS program staff, private providers, or other authorized persons have determined that out-of-

home placement is the next action unless an alternative intervention is successful in addressing issues that will permit a child(ren) to remain in the home.

- Alternative, less intensive intervention strategies have been tried, without success or considered but determined to not be in the best interest of the family or at-risk youths.
- Direct and immediate intensive family preservation services intervention is necessary to prevent out-of-home placement.
- At least one parent or other primary caregiver indicates that she or he is willing and able to participate in IFPS.

Characteristics of IFPS

- Intensive Family Preservation Services are specific short-term, crisis intervention services provided by specifically trained staff in the family's home or community. Services are intended to help create long-term changes in the home environment. Services are targeted to families with children at imminent risk of out-of-home placement.
- Services are time limited. Families receive Intensive Family Preservation Services for an average of four weeks but not more than six weeks.
- Services are home-based. At least one-half of the caseworker's time spent providing family preservation services to a family is spent in face to face contact in the family's home and community.
- Services focus on promoting family competence.
- Services are provided in a culturally competent manner.
- Services provided are both therapeutic and concrete.
- Family preservation caseworkers are available to each family by telephone and on call for visits 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- Supervisory responsibilities are similar to those of the FPS supervisor.

Response to Referrals

There must be immediate response to referrals for IFPS. If the IFPS provider has an opening and the referral information indicated that IFPS seems to be an appropriate option, a visit should occur no later than 48 hours. If the family is accepted for IFPS, services must begin immediately.

Caseloads for IFPS

Caseloads are small, with a legal maximum of four families at any given time. Supervisory staff ratio is 1:4.

c. Training and Service Delivery for FPS and IFPS

Both FPS and IFPS workers are required to complete extensive training for service delivery that includes:

- Introduction to Family-Centered Practice
- Strategies for Individual Family Members
- Working With the Family System
- Coordinating Resources With the Family
- Cultural Competency
- Introduction to Family Preservation Services
- Screening and Intake
- Assessment and Goal Setting
- Implementing the Family Plan
- Ongoing Evaluation, Termination, and Follow-up
- Program Evaluation and Record Keeping
- Care of the Counselor

All Family Preservation Programs and Intensive Family Preservation Programs are **required** to provide the following services:

- Family assessment
- Family and individual counseling
- Client advocacy
- Case management/Referral to other services (as appropriate)
- Development and enhancement of parenting skills

Beyond these required services, it is expected that local IFPS programs will provide or help families obtain a broad range of therapeutic, supportive and concrete services to address the particular objectives in the families' own treatment plan.

Optional services include tangible services provided by the FPS worker or agency. Some examples are financial assistance, household chores or repairs, and transportation.